

## REPORT FROM SCANDINAVIA – NO. 1

### Ishpeming Man Describes Trip Into Norseland

(EDITOR'S NOTE- This is the first in a series of special feature articles written by Vincent H. Malmstrom, of Ishpeming. As the recipient of a Fulbright scholarship grant to Norway, he will spend the coming year in research and travel in Northern Europe. From time to time, The Mining Journal will publish his articles touching on the various phases of life in modern Scandinavia, in the belief that his observations as a geographer and fellow Upper Peninsulan may be of interest to our readers.)

BY VINCENT H. MALMSTROM

OSLO, July 29--The visitor to Norway can have no more thrilling and spectacular introduction to the country than that offered by the west coast port of Bergen.

On the morning our ship approached the entrance to Bergen's twisted fjord, the sky was clear and the sun was shining brightly. This was a little unusual in itself, since Bergen has one of the cloudiest and rainiest climates anywhere in Europe.

From the fringing lines of small rock islands, or skerries as they are called, the coast rose abruptly in great stone headlands. Toward the interior, ridge on ridge of blue and purple mountains rose, culminating in great white snow fields on the highest peaks. To use the word "peak" in describing Norwegian mountains, however, is not quite accurate, because there are very few sharply tapered mountains. Most of them have been smoothed and rounded by the great ice sheets that once covered most of Scandinavia, as they did our own northern Michigan. Mountain glaciers still cover parts of the Norwegian mountains, but these could not be seen from the ship.

#### **Red, White And Green**

As our ship wound deeper into the fjord, I saw little patches of green grass scattered over the low rocky shores. And almost everywhere there was a patch of green you would also see a house, most often painted white with a red roof. It seemed that everywhere man could get a footing on the rugged coast he had built a house. These were the homes of small fishermen and farmers, each a lord and master unto himself, isolated from any neighbors he might have by rock or water.

Farther into the fjord I saw sheep grazing placidly on the coarse grasses, entirely unmindful of the great passing liner. Farther in yet I caught sight of the first trees -- not conifers as you might suppose, but broad-leaf trees like the maple and birch. Here the grasses must have been better too, for now instead of sheep I saw lazy brown cattle pasturing on the green slopes.

## **The Approaches of Bergen**

The ridges around us grew ever higher the farther we went into the fjord. The small coastal and island pastures were squeezed out by the rock walls and on the steeper slopes I spied great stands of conifers, mainly spruces and pine. In addition to the little fishing docks that clung to the rocky shore, there were summer houses and cottages interspersed up and down the forest-covered sides of the fjord. Here and there, as the fjord opened out into other fjords, one could glimpse the white spires of a church.

As we came closer into the head of the fjord where Bergen is located, various industrial installations crowded out from the narrow, rocky walls to meet us. Oil depots bearing familiar American names and fish canneries told us we were finally nearing the city itself. The summer houses on the over-looking cliffs became more numerous and soon we spied the city of Bergen spread out on the mountain flanks just ahead of us.

## **Flagpoles And Power Lines**

Before reaching the city, I felt qualified to make a couple of generalizations on what I had already seen, namely, that every good Norwegian has a flagpole and that every accessible Norwegian has electricity. All along the fjord I could not help but notice the veritable forest of white flagpoles that rose from the front yards of the houses, nor could I fail to see the wide swath cut by the power lines as they crept over the ridges down to even the most isolated homes.

Bergen is Norway's second largest city with something over 150,000 inhabitants. It is called by Norwegians the "City of the Seven Mountains," for as the visitor will quickly realize, seven great ridges overlook the snug little harbor. On one of these, Fløyen, a cable railway has been built, and from the top the tourist may get a panoramic view of Bergen and its environs, providing of course the frequent mists from the sea do not obscure visibility.

## **Spectacular Contrast**

The city itself is a spectacular contrast of old and new. Not far from where our ship, the "Stavangerfjord," tied up, was the old German wharf, or "Tyskebryggen." This collection of merchants' houses, shops, and clubrooms dates from the middle of the 14th century when the Hanseatic League dominated Norway's ' economic life. A few blocks away there rises an ultramodern department store, replete with glass bricks and concrete,

Other than this great impression of contrast, Bergen seemed to me to be a city of children. In any residential block of Bergen, I would dare say, you would find twice or three times as many children in any comparable block of an American city. This may of course be

partly explained by the fact that Bergen traffic is less than a third of that in any comparable American city, making the streets a relatively safe place in which to play.

### **Memories of Horror**

Five years after the end of the last War the scars and memories of the German occupation are still fresh in Bergen. As we passed into the inner harbor, the sight of a moss-covered German bunker reminded us of the West wall Hitler had built to ring his 'Fortress Europe.' Giant U-boat pens, now in the process of being demolished, still remain to add their sinister note to an otherwise peaceful scene. And in the center of the waterfront itself construction gangs are still working to replace the many buildings that were levelled when a German munitions ship exploded in the harbor. But slowly and surely these wounds are being healed. It will be the memories that will last the longest.

Our second port of call was Stavanger, about 100 miles south of Bergen. This tight little city is famous the world over as a fish-canning center, and it wouldn't be too fantastic to say that many Marquette county housewives have fish delicacies on their pantry shelves right now from the Christian Bjelland factories in Stavanger. The entire waterfront is taken up by his factories and his name is the first to greet you on arriving and the last to fade from view on leaving.

### **Stavanger's Charm**

Stavanger, like Bergen and most of Norway for that matter, is also a blend of contrasts -- contrasts such as the cathedral built in 1128 and the modern trans-Atlantic airport at Sola just outside the city.

But Stavanger has a charm of its own. The people of Stavanger call it the "City of Gardens," and unlike many chamber of commerce designations, this one is well justified. Every yard has flowers; or flowering trees, and even in the more modest homes without yards, the passerby notices potted plants in the windows. Every homemaker in Stavanger seems to have a green thumb, and maybe it is just as well, for Stavanger impressed me as being more drab and ancient than Bergen. This may come as a natural reaction: After being over-whelmed by the natural setting of Bergen, one feels that Stavanger is somewhat less colorful.

### **Deep Personal Tragedy**

The surrounding mountains are much lower, more like hills actually, and the rolling ground is occupied by farms. From the Stavanger region east along the south coast of Norway are some of Norway's best farm lands, and here as in our own country, the more productive areas are likely to be less impressive to the tourist. One has only to compare the very fertile but quite monotonous corn belt of the United States for example, with the beautiful but almost unproductive Black Hills region.

Our guide on the tour of the city and its outskirts was a woman of about 40 whose husband, we came to learn, had been a prisoner in a German concentration camp for four years. The offhand manner in which she spoke of her deep personal tragedy moved every one of us. How strange it must be to live for five long years in fear and anxiety and then five short years afterward try to go on smiling, as if it were all a bad dream! She seemed to typify Norway to us -- an unconquerable spirit and a brave resolution to meet the future, come what may.

### **Visits Ancient Cathedral**

Before leaving Stavanger I should mention our visit to the 800-year old cathedral. As we entered the church, a choir of girls was singing a hymn set to the music of Sibelius' "Finlandia." What more beautiful music in what more hallowed surroundings could one imagine? We sat down beneath the same arches that curved gracefully heavenward above Viking kings eight centuries ago, and as we did so, the organist started playing the "Pilgrim's Song" by Wagner. This he did on a new organ donated by Bjelland, the canning king, once again impressing us with the harmonious blending of new and old found in every phase of Norwegian life.

Our final port of call before arriving in Oslo was Kristiansand, near the southern tip of Norway. Kristiansand was as completely unlike either of the other cities we had visited as a Norwegian city could be. The mountains are more like bluffs here, but their colors are much more vivid than those of Bergen or Stavanger. Here, instead of dark bluish rock, pink granite cropped out everywhere, setting off the deep green of the pines and spruces very effectively.

The city's skyline itself is dominated by 'the brightly-lighted,' smoke-belching nickel refineries just west of the town. Because of the very plentiful and cheap hydroelectric power in this region, nickel ore is brought all the way from the Sudbury district of Canada to be smelted.

Kristiansand itself is unique in another way, for it is one of the few cities in Norway (or the rest of Europe for that matter) that has straight streets intersecting at right angles. For that reason we Americans felt that Kristiansand was more like an American city, as indeed it was. It owes this rectilinear pattern to a King of Denmark who decreed that it should be so, and as a result Kristiansand with its broad straight streets will not for a long time have the traffic experienced in some of the older sections of other Norwegian cities.

As we slipped out the harbor that night, we were all eagerly awaiting our arrival the following morning in Oslo, Norway's capital and largest city.

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